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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **LOS ANGELES COUNTY COUPLE SENTENCED FOR POACHING SUCCULENTS FROM GARRAPATA STATE PARK**

*People v. Guanrong Rivera; Case No. 18CR009464*

*People v. Jose Luis Rivera; Case No. 18CR009465*

*SALINAS*, California- Monterey County District Attorney Jeannine M. Pacioni announced today that on January 31, Guanrong Rivera, 49, and Jose Luis Rivera, 64, were sentenced for illegally poaching succulents off the coast of Garrapata State Park. Monterey County Superior Court Judge Rafael Vazquez presided.

On May 5, 2018, the Monterey County Sheriff's Office received a tip that a woman and a man had climbed up a cliff on the coastal side of Highway 1 in Garrapata State Park and were loading bags of succulents, *Dudleya farinosas*, into the back of their vehicle. The reporting party confronted the two, later identified as Guanrong and Jose Rivera, who laughed and acknowledged that they knew the activity was illegal. Before the Riveras headed south, the reporting party took a picture of suspects, their vehicle, and license plate. The Sheriff's Office referred the matter to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife ("CDFW").

The license plate number led CDFW to a residence in Palmdale, California. CDFW wildlife wardens conducted surveillance of the residence, where they observed Guanrong Rivera walking in and out of her garage taking over 100 photographs of what appeared to be *Dudleyas* on her driveway. Some of the succulents had white tags.

On May 10, 2018, CDFW wardens served a search warrant at the Rivera residence. Approximately 600 *Dudleyas* were found inside the garage. Ms. Rivera, who was at the residence, stated that she had taken succulents from the Big Sur area on their recent vacation to Carmel and that she had intended to sell them to customers in China. The wardens called Mr. Rivera, who also admitted to taking succulents on their recent trip to Carmel. The *Dudleyas* were transported to UC Santa Cruz to be evaluated to be returned to the wild.

Cameras seized during the search warrant revealed photographs of Ms. Rivera harvesting Dudleyas next to the coast and posing with the uprooted plants.

A search of Ms. Rivera's phone revealed "We Chat" messages between her and someone who appeared to identify as Ms. Rivera's niece. The messages were in Mandarin and was later professionally translated. In the messages, the two appeared to be conspiring to sell illegally-harvested California succulents to customers in China. Conversations included concerns about getting the plants by customs, website management, pricing, and plans to visit other locations in California to harvest more succulents based on their customers' demands. A message from the niece stated, "From the article regarding the Koreans arrested, I learned that Dudleya farinose usually grows in wildness in northern California." This message was likely referencing the three Korean nationals who were arrested for illegally poaching Dudleyas in California in April 2018.

In another message, the niece asked whether Ms. Rivera had shipped the goods. Ms. Rivera responded with a picture of a receipt and customs form. The customs form had listed the contents of the package as "Make-up Vitamin," instead of Dudleyas, a practice commonly used by wildlife smugglers. Other messages included conversations with customers.

On January 15, 2019, Jose Luis Rivera entered a no contest plea to illegally taking plants from Garrapata State Park, a misdemeanor. He was sentenced to 40 days in the county jail, three years of informal probation, a \$4,018 fine, and ordered to stay away from all national and state parks within the State of California.

Today, Guanrong Rivera entered no contest pleas to grand theft, a felony; vandalism, a felony; and illegally taking plants from Garrapata State park, a misdemeanor. She was immediately sentenced to three years of formal probation and ordered to serve 179 days in the county jail, pay a \$9,999.90 fine, pay a \$10,000 contribution to CDFW, pay restitution to the California Department of Parks and Recreation, forfeit all seized succulents, and to stay away from all national and state parks within the State of California. The Riveras may serve their jail sentences under an alternative program if eligible.

The case was investigated by CDFW's Special Operations Unit.

The public is encouraged to turn in poachers and polluters by calling 1-888-334-CalTIP. CalTIP (Californians Turn In Poachers and Polluters) is an anonymous tip program that helps the California Department of Fish and Wildlife protect the state's fish and wildlife resources. More information about CalTIP is found here: <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/enforcement/caltip>.